

January 20, 2011

Dear Marilyn,

I will be out of State when the Children and Families Division presents their budget.
Please distribute my written testimony at the appropriate time.

I have been able to follow most of the hearings on the Internet.

I know how busy you are and I appreciate all you do so much.

With Thanks,



Edith J. Clark
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Mr Chairman, Members of the Committee:

For the record my name is Edith Clark. My address is Sweet Grass, Mt. I am sending this testimony as a private citizen at my own volition.

As a former State Representative I spent most of my terms serving on Health and Human Service Committees. I now serve on several State Advisory Committees and in that capacity I have had the opportunity to learn more about the intricate funding mechanisms, the federal mandates that accompany Federal funding and the incredible work the DPHHS folks have done and are continuing to do to improve the way they do business and in turn serve the public more effectively and efficiently.

I am well aware of the monumental task that is before you and I Thank you for your willingness to listen and sift the facts before you make very difficult decisions.

In the interest of time I will give a short example of my observation as a 12 year member of the Child and Family Service State Advisory Board.

In March of 2006 there were 2100 kids in care. Cases were not resolved for many months. Court hearings were delayed, kids, families, and social workers were frustrated. Legislative Committees spent many hours hearing testimony concerning specific cases.

The longer a case continues the more expense is involved. At present because of a lot of commitment to improvement and program changes to a Family Centered Practice Model families are receiving help with counseling and guidance to keep kids from ever leaving the family and when having to be placed out of care the kids are reunited faster or they are placed more quickly in a permanent, safe setting. To date there are 1631 kids in care.

Most of the General Fund dollars are used for In Home Services which supports families and helps keep kids out of care. This service also speeds reunification.

Foster Care is vital to this division. The Federal Mandate of this Division is to protect children. It is very difficult to recruit and retain families to care for children that have been removed from their families and must be placed in protective care. The families that provide Foster care need and deserve financial and social support.

There is a Federal mandate that states every child in care shall receive a monthly face to face meeting with a social worker in the child's home, in state or out of state. This year will require a 90% compliance rate which is hard to meet due to weather and distances and other commitments by the social workers. The lowest federal sanction for not meeting this criteria is about \$30,000. The Division is also under a 2 year Program Improvement Plan with 9 reporting outcomes to meet. The sanction for not meeting the criteria for one Improvement is 1% of the Federal Grant which amounts to about \$1.8 million. You are probably much better at the math than I am.

To close, this Division has 380 employees. 317 are placed statewide in Regional offices in rural Montana. 18 are employed by Centralized Intake which takes calls and refers cases Statewide. This means 335 are helping and spreading their earnings statewide. They also have 51 vacancies.

Thank you for consideration of this written testimony. I will be out of state during this hearing. I have listened to your hearings on the Internet and I Thank you for your courteous deliberations.

Edith J. Clark

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edith J. Clark". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.